

Testimony on Bill 7292: AAC Social Workers Title Protection
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 12th, 2019
Submitted by: Shannon Perkins, LMSW

Dear members of

My name is Shannon Perkins, I am a lifelong Connecticut resident and I currently live in New Haven. As a board member of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers I want to thank the Labor and Public Employees Committee for raising Bill 7292: AAC Social Workers Title Protection meant to ensure that only those with a baccalaureate or masters degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education accredited program by use the title of social worker. With passage of this bill, Connecticut will become the 36th state to ensure protection of the social work title.

I believe that the current raised bill was intended to apply to all social workers, including BSWs and MSWs who may not hold a clinical license. The current language in bill 7292 restricts the use of the social work title to only those with a license; in effect, this language would prevent BSWs and MSWs who are not licensed from using the title of social worker despite having a formal education in social work. I am asking the committee to please revise the language of the bill with substitute language which is included at the bottom of this testimony. I also ask that the new language be in a separate section of the statute from Sec. 20-195q, so as to not confuse the general title protection we are seeking from the protection related to licensed social worker whereby one can only refer to themselves as a licensed social worker if so licensed.

Social work title protection is necessary first and foremost to give consumers assurance that when they are working with an individual called a social worker that the worker is indeed a professionally trained social worker. The NASW Code of Ethics states that social workers should ensure that their representations to clients are accurate. Yet those who do not hold a social work degree do not practice under the Social Work Code of Ethics and by using the title social worker are in fact misrepresenting to the public their Qualifications.

To attain a social work degree requires completing a comprehensive curriculum that is nationally accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. CT has 7 schools graduating BSWs, 5 schools graduating MSWs and another school that will bring in their first classes in the fall. Of the schools, 5 BSW programs and 2 MSW programs are public universities. Thus, Connecticut has invested considerable resources into training professional social workers who deserve to have title protection.

This bill will not cause workers to lose their job. This bill does not restrict persons without a social work degree from performing social service tasks as long as they do not

identify themselves as or use the title of social worker. There are many other titles that employers can use, including social service worker, case manager, human services worker, caseworker, etc. This bill simply says that if you are using the title social worker you must hold a degree in social work.

This bill may prove of assistance to employers by having them understand the differences of a professional social worker vs. an employee with the title but not the degree.

Especially in terms of liability, it is better for an employer to have a professional degreed social worker who practices in accordance with the professional standards of practice.

CT statute already protects the title of numerous professions, including Psychologist, Chiropractor, Occupational Therapist & Occupational Therapist Assistant, Physical Therapist, Veterinarian, and Massage Therapist, to name just some examples. Social Work, that has existed as a profession for over 100 years deserves to be added to this list. NASW/CT looks forward to working with Public Health Committee to draft adequate substitute language and to pass bill 7292.

The following is our recommended language:

Social Workers: Title Protection suggested language.

Contact: Kate Robinson 860-878-2469 & Bill Welz 860-377-0777

Gallo & Robinson

Sec. 20-195w. Social Work Title Protection. (a) No person shall (1) use the title "social worker" or any initials associated with such title, or (2) advertise services under the description of social worker, as defined in section 20-195m, unless such person has attained a baccalaureate or master degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education accredited program or a doctoral degree in social work.

(b) Persons using the title of social worker without a degree in social work shall be notified to cease use of the title of social worker, such notice shall also be sent to the employer of said person. The Commissioner of Public Health or their designated representative, will be responsible for enforcement of this Act.

(c) (1) Nothing in this section shall prevent any person employed by the Department of Children and Families prior to July 1, 2019 with a title in the social work series of the classified service for using a title in such series to describe or perform his duties in the course of his or her employment with the Department of Children and Families. (2) The Department of Children and Families may employ social work trainees and social workers who do not hold a social work degree at time of hire and such employees may use the title social worker trainee or social worker if such hires attain a master degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education accredited program or a doctoral degree in social work within five (5) years of the date of employment with the Department of Children and Families.